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AUTHOR Smith, Richard J.; Dauer, Velma
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ABSTRACT

The inservice program described in this paper was a successful attempt to help 30 teachers from kindergarten through grade six learn together, plan together, and experience the satisfaction that comes from improving classroom reading programs. A description of the format of the program emphasizes the importance of providing for the individual differences of the participants, specificity of the teaching strategies demonstrated, and effective leadership. The program was evaluated by means of activity log sheets written by the participants, and a questionnaire submitted at the end of the program asking for opinions on the most helpful elements of the program, a rating of the program on a 5-point scale, and comments on how the program may be improved. (JD)

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AN INSERVICE PROGRAM FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS: A DESCRIPTION

by

Richard J. Smith
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Velma Dauer
Edgerton, Wisconsin Public Schools

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Inservice education in reading for classroom teachers is not a professional frill. Teachers need to be informed about the ongoing work of theorists and researchers in the field of reading and about new developments in instructional materials. They also need opportunities to exchange ideas and to work with colleagues in matters pertaining to reading instruction. Perhaps most of all, they need the rejuvenation that comes from learning about and trying out something new and something helpful to their students' reading achievement.

Unfortunately, teachers often report that their inservice education experiences are neither informative, cooperative nor rejuvenating. In a study by Logan and Erickson (1979) a sample of 204 elementary teachers rates their inservice education experiences on a five point scale as follows:

1	2	3	4	5
Excellent quality, significant content, appropriate processes				Poor quality, insignificant content, imappropriate processes
3%	18%	36%	29%	14%

Other formal and informal surveys have pointed to the same conclusion: in general, elementary classroom teachers leave most inservice education sessions less than satisfied. The inservice program described in this article was a successful attempt to help 30 teachers from kindergarten through grade six learn together, plan together, and experience the satisfaction that comes from improving classroom reading programs.

PLANNING THE INSERVICE PROGRAM

The inservice program was intended not only to help the participating teachers develop new understandings and techniques pertinent to their expressed needs, but also to develop positive attitudes toward inservice education. Thus, decisions regarding the design of the program, or how it would proceed, were as important as what specific content would be covered. Characteristics of effective inservice education such as the following were kept in mind during the planning stages: (1) Participants should be involved in designing the program. (2) An atmosphere of trust and support in which participants feel free to risk new behaviors should be provided (Wood, Thompson, & Russell, 1981). (3) Small group activities

should be incorporated into the program so that participants may learn from each other (Wood & Thompson, 1980).

Initial planning began with informal discussions with the teachers and the school principal regarding needs that might be met through inservice. These discussions began several months before the inservice program took place and were initiated by the K-12 reading specialist who holds a leadership role in the district for planning, organizing and evaluating formal reading inservice programs. The discussions served two purposes. First, they generated interest in participation. Second, they provided feedback from teachers, feedback which was useful in securing administrative support for the program. A major part of that support was agreeing that professional improvement credits which contribute to salary increases would be awarded to participating teachers.

After administrative approval was given and a general plan made known to the faculty at a staff meeting, a committee was formed to begin formal planning. The committee consisted of teachers who volunteered, the elementary language arts consultant, and the K-12 reading specialist.

The first task of the committee was to design an instrument to identify specific areas of need and interest. A list of possible topics was developed by the committee. The list was distributed as a survey to all potential participants, and teachers were invited to add their own suggestions. Results of the needs assessment survey were tallied and rank ordered to determine which topics would receive the most emphasis.

The planning committee also discussed the format for the program and made several specific suggestions in this regard. These suggestions included the number of sessions and time of day for meeting, a recommendation for a consultant from a nearby university to lead the sessions, a requirement for each participants to carry out a project, the type of evaluation procedures to be employed, the meeting room, and provisions for refreshments.

The committee's plans were discussed with the university consultant, who consented to lead the sessions and help plan the details of the program. The consultant and K-12 reading specialist identified topics for the sessions based on the needs assessment information and planned the format for the sessions. The consultant provided a detailed description of the program, which was approved by the committee and distributed to all potential participants.

THE PROGRAM FORMAT

The first of the seven, one and one-half hour, after-school sessions began with a lecture/discussion for 20-25 minutes led by the consultant. The first lecture/discussion topic was, "Helping Students Develop a Correct Perception of the Reading Process." That topic set the stage for subsequent sessions by emphasizing that reading is a communication process and should always be taught as such. The topics for the second through the seventh meetings were the following: Motivating Students to Read, Teaching Word Identification Skills, Vocabulary Development, Comprehension Development, Identifying Students with Reading Problems--Diagnosing and Correcting Their Problems, and Teaching Skills and Attitudes for Informational Reading.

For each topic the consultant described and/or demonstrated an activity that could be used or adapted for use in the classroom; for example, constructing comprehension questions at higher cognitive levels and using cloze procedure for instructional purposes. Participants worked through the activity as individuals or in small groups, then came together as a large group to discuss their work. By working through the activity, procedures were clarified and teachers were motivated to use it with their classes. Following the discussion, volunteers were solicited to experiment with the activity and report back to the group at the following session. After the first meeting these reports were given at the beginnings of the meetings.

Each participant in the inservice program was responsible for identifying a teaching project to work on during the two months over which the inservice sessions were scheduled. To facilitate the selection of projects the consultant prepared a list of suggestions from which participants could choose; however, teachers were free to develop their own ideas for teaching projects.

At the first session, project discussion groups of five or six teachers were established. Thereafter, at each session, these groups met for the teachers to discuss their progress with the projects they had chosen while the consultant circulated among groups acting as a resource person. Each project group was assigned to report at a specified meeting to the entire group about the different projects on which individuals in the group were working. The following are examples of projects the teachers chose: helping children write and read their own books (Language Experience); using poetry to teach specific reading skills; tape recording a play with a low group; developing enrichment activities relating to basal series selections for

students to complete; constructing tests that assess comprehension at several cognitive levels; using content area textbooks to teach context clue analysis.

To encourage professional reading, approximately sixty books on loan from the consultant were available for check-out. The books were stored on a cart and were made available at each session. Although most teachers did not take advantage of the collection of books, several commented about the usefulness of the ones they selected. Two teachers asked and were permitted to keep books they were reading beyond the close of the inservice series.

Refreshments served at the beginning of each session helped participants relax, enjoy several minutes of conversation and obtain an end-of-day energy boost. The seating arrangement used to promote interaction and attentiveness was a circular arrangement of tables, with chairs placed on the outside of the circle. For small group activities two classrooms were used to keep distractions to a minimum.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

Two formal methods of evaluation were used to determine the effectiveness of the inservice program. The first was an activity log kept by participants. Activities used in the classroom as a result of the inservice program were recorded on the form, along with evaluative comments. The teachers were required to submit their logs to the reading specialist at the conclusion of the seven sessions. The following shows the format of the log with excerpts from four different teachers' logs.

Session Topic	Activities Used in Classroom	Comments
Helping Students Develop a Correct Perception of the Reading Process	Language experience activities: Dictated stories by individuals, Self-written stories, Group-dictated stories	The language experience approach definitely introduces reading as a natural process to children (Kindergarten teacher).
Motivating Students To Read	Started a timed silent reading session in which students choose a partner, read for 8 minutes, and talked about what have read for 30 seconds. Excellent idea! Students really responded in a very positive way.	I liked the ideas about assessing my own attitudes toward reading. It really got me thinking about what kind of image I was portraying to my students. Since then I try to read more to students and share with them articles and stories I've been reading..(4th grade teacher)

Session Topic	Activities Used in Classroom	Comments
Teaching Word Identification Skills	I used the cloze precedure with some of my children	Children enjoyed the activity (1st grade teacher)
Comprehension Development	Developed my own comprehension questions instead of ones our book used. Let the class know before they read what things to look for.	I learned some things about what makes up a good comprehension question. I feel the class learned more about the reading process and their own reading. (3rd grade teacher)

The second evaluation instrument was a questionnaire. Responses to two questions were requested: "What was most helpful in the inservice series?" and "How could the series have been improved?" In addition, participants were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of the inservice program on a 5-point scale. Comments regarding any aspects of the program were also encouraged.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following are sample comments from participants in response to the question "What was most helpful in the inservice series?"

--Most valuable for me were the ideas presented to use in the classroom. Also valuable was the lecture/ discussion format.

--Quality, practical ideas--and a multitude of them.

--The openness and good feelings of everyone.

--It was helpful to get a good review of the reading process with some very good lectures and activities...I enjoyed the participation and the learning together with my fellow teachers. It was very well organized. I enjoyed attending each session.

Only 76% of the participants responded to the second question, "How could the series have been improved?" Of these, 21% expressed frustration with lack of time to try all of the activities, 11% felt that more lecture time would have been appreciated, and 58% stated that the inservice was fine the way it was.

The overall effectiveness of the inservice program was rated by participants as follows:

Very Effective				Not at all Effective
5	4	3	2	1
77%	19%	4%		

Additional comments given by participants expressed appreciation for the program and the desire for more inservice.

Other sources of information were useful as informal evaluation measures. For example, a list of teaching projects carried out by participants was compiled for distribution to all for reference purposes. The list showed that many worthwhile teaching practices and activities had been incorporated into classroom instruction because of the inservice program. Also, attendance records revealed that the average attendance rate for the session was 93%, with illness reportedly the reason for most absences. The informal comments of teachers expressing their enthusiasm for the program were also useful in evaluating it.

Apparently the program was both informative and enjoyable, since 96% of the participants gave the program a positive rating. Judging from formal and informal evaluations teachers completed the program looking forward to more inservice.

Surely the format of the sessions providing for the individual preferences of the participants, specificity of the teaching strategies demonstrated, and effective leadership were all contributing factors for the success of this program. Perhaps the variable that contributed most to the success of the program was the format of the meetings. For all but the first meeting, the agenda was the same: (1) Reports from volunteers regarding the classroom application of the activity that was demonstrated at the previous meeting, (2) fifteen to twenty minute lecture/discussion on a topic suggested by the needs assessment, (3) demonstration of and participation in a topic-related activity that could be implemented in the classroom, (4) ten to fifteen minute small-group discussions in project groups and (5) five minute report from one of the project groups.

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